



**TESTIMONY FOR:
THE MICHIGAN HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES' EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 25, 2010**

BY: Kenneth M. Smith, President,
Jobs for America's Graduates, Inc.

Mr. Chairman. Let me thank you **very** much for giving me the opportunity to provide you and your colleagues on the Committee a short briefing on the 30-year track record of success of Jobs for America's Graduates, including early success here in Michigan, in the Greater Benton Harbor area.

Very briefly, Jobs for America's Graduates is celebrating its 30th Anniversary this year, having served over 700,000 of our nation's most at-risk young people with what we believe to be compelling and remarkably consistent results across those 30 years:

- The **Graduation Rate** was 94%!
- The **Full-time Jobs Rate** was 66%, exceeding the JAG Standard of 60 percent.
- The **Full-Time Placement Rate** was 89% exceeding the JAG Standard of 80 percent. This is the percentage of graduates engaged in full-time employment or a combination of employment and postsecondary education.
- The **Positive Outcome Rate** was 79%. The positive outcomes include: civilian or military employment and/or enrollment in a postsecondary education institution.
- The **Further Education Rate** was 46%. That is all the more impressive when one considers that 70 percent of the young people who participate in the JAG program were in the bottom half of their class based on grade point average.

Our national organization has been led, since its inception by Governors. Nine Governors now serve on our Board of Directors — one of the largest numbers of Governors to serve on any Board other than the National Governors Association, along with senior executives from a dozen of the nation's most committed companies. Those companies include major employers here in Michigan, such as:

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| • AT&T | • IBM |
| • Verizon | • General Electric |
| • JPMorgan Chase | • Honeywell |
| • Bank of America | • Ford |
| • Toys 'R' Us | • Archer Daniels
Midland Ford |

Their support reflects the impact they have seen, firsthand, of the approach of Jobs for America's Graduates that has had such remarkable results and, we believe, demonstrates convincingly that we know what it takes for young people to succeed both in education and on the job.

You will be pleased to know that there has been recent success in one of the most challenging parts of Michigan with the implementation of the JAG program. In five schools in the Greater Benton Harbor area, under the leadership of the "Michigan Works!" led by Todd Gustafson and with the enthusiastic support of the School District and community leaders. As you know, the Benton Harbor school system is one of the most challenged in the country, given the great difficulties that have been longstanding in the Benton Harbor area. Our Accreditation Team reports that the JAG implementation in Benton Harbor has been as efficient and as effective as any that we have seen in our 30 years of experience – and the initial results are fully consistent with the national results I've described above.

State Superintendent Mike Flannagan has actively encouraged the implementation of the program in Benton Harbor as a pilot for consideration for youth elsewhere around the state and has recently taken the time to personally visit the program in the past few months.

Back in the late 1980s, we were pleased to have a test site in Kalamazoo as well through the support of the Upjohn Institute that also had great success. Regrettably, funding was not available to continue the program at that time.

Let me note that Jobs for America's Graduates is the only organization, to the best of our knowledge, that offers a comprehensive set of Model Applications that begin in middle school and continue through all the grades of high school. We also provide a Dropout Recovery Application of our Model that helps dropouts gain high school diplomas or GEDs, receive employability skills, and to the degree possible, secure a technical skill, working often in concert with community colleges so that they can get better-quality jobs.

LOOKING AHEAD

We do realize these are the most difficult of budget times in the state. We realize that any "new" program is, therefore, very difficult to consider and so many cuts are underway of existing programs. Yet, we also know of your determination to find ways to improve the outcomes of public education in Michigan as well as, so very importantly, at this time of highest unemployment rate among teenagers in American history — to find ways to expand opportunities for high-risk young people, in particular, to secure work.

That's why I'm here —we hope that we might explore together the possibility of utilizing **existing** resources from both state resources **and** those from local school districts and

Workforce Investment Boards who might be willing to redirect existing funds based on the track work of success of Jobs for America's Graduates and its cost effectiveness.

Right after this testimony, I was delighted to be invited to the quarterly meeting of the Association of Workforce Investment Boards here in Michigan to present the early results in Benton Harbor and the results over the past 30 years across the country, serving the over 700,000 young people I mentioned.

As you know, the Workforce Investment Boards have approximately tripled the previous levels of funding as a result of the Stimulus Act. It also appears that some additional funding may be forthcoming from the Congress in light of the extraordinary unemployment around the country, including the worst unemployment rate in history for teenagers.

To help with consideration, our 32 states have drawn from a very broad variety of resources in states with very different budget situations, including Illinois, Florida, Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, and Indiana.

Sources of funding that can be used for the JAG program include:

- State and local school funding
- Workforce Investment Act
- TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)
- The Carl Perkins Federal Vocational Funds
- Federal Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Funds

In addition, of course, there's the opportunity with the "Race to the Top" and the Federal competition coming up for the "Innovation Fund" as a part of "Race to the Top".

We are honored to receive some funding from hundreds of employers and dozens of major companies as partial funding, working with government resources, because of the impact that those companies have consistently seen.

Our Affiliates also have important support from a wide variety of local community foundations, United Ways, service club organizations and others.

In short, the Benton Harbor area and those in 32 other states around the country have made the determination that the kinds of sustained results I mentioned justify careful consideration of how to redirect existing funds in order to achieve better results consistent with the goals that the state and this Legislature have set.

I can commit to you that Jobs for America's Graduates, its Board of Directors, its management, and its Affiliates would be enthusiastic about working together in the design of the strategy that fits the goals of the Legislature and the communities who would like to work with us in bringing the promise of Jobs for America's Graduates to their communities.

Thank you so much for your consideration and your time. I'd be happy to answer any questions.



Academics • Employability Skills • High School Graduation • Work-Based Learning • Postsecondary Education • Career

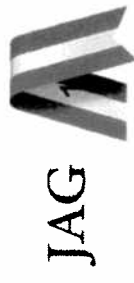
Jobs for **America's** Graduates

Presentation for:

Michigan Workforce Investment Boards

February 25, 2010

"The 4-R's of JAG—Rigor, Relevance, Recognition and Rewards"





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The Dropout Problem

- ☑ The dropout problem wreaks economic havoc, costing the U.S. as much as \$200 billion each year in lost productivity and tax revenue.
- ☑ Dropouts likely:
 - Dependent on public assistance
 - Have health problems
 - Engage in criminal activity
- ☑ U.S. would save \$41.8 billion in health care costs if the 600,000 dropouts in 2004 were to complete one or more years of schooling.
- ☑ Increasing high school completion by 1 percent for all men (ages 20-60) would save the U.S. up to \$1.4 billion per year in reduced crime.

"The 4-R's of JAG—Rigor, Relevance, Recognition and Rewards"





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Solution to “The Dropout Problem”

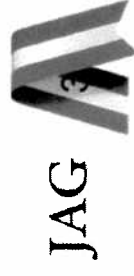
“JAG” is a cost-effective dropout prevention, dropout recovery and employment solution to serve young people who are greatest at risk of:

- staying in school through graduation or completing a GED;
- pursuing a postsecondary education; and/or,
- securing a quality entry-level job that leads to career advancement opportunities.

JAG Affiliates have served over 700,000 young people since 1980 with significant barriers to success.

JAG has enjoyed the support of elected public officials and corporate executives for 30 years.

“The 4-R’s of JAG—Rigor, Relevance, Recognition and Rewards”





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Governor Pete du Pont Founder (DE)	Governor Charles S. Robb (VA)	Governor John R. McKernan, Jr. (ME)	Governor George V. Voinovich (OH)	Governor Marc Racicot (MT)	Julie Nixon Eisenhower (PA)	Governor Tom Vilsack (IA)	Governor Janet Napolitano (AZ)	Governor John E. Baldacci (ME)
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29 Years of Leadership Excellence

"The 4-R's of JAG—Rigor, Relevance, Recognition and Rewards"





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1979
1980
1981

1986
1987

1988
1989
1990

1993
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1997
1998

1999
2000
2003
2004
2005

2006
2008

2009

1. Delaware (*The 1st State*)

2. Arizona

3. Massachusetts

4. Tennessee

5. Ohio

6. Georgia

7. New Hampshire

8. Maine

9. California

10. Mississippi

11. Montana

12. Kentucky

13. Alabama

14. Arkansas

15. Illinois

16. Louisiana

17. Virginia

18. West Virginia

19. Florida

20. Wisconsin

21. Iowa

22. Minnesota

23. New Mexico

24. Missouri

25. South Carolina

26. Colorado

27. Indiana

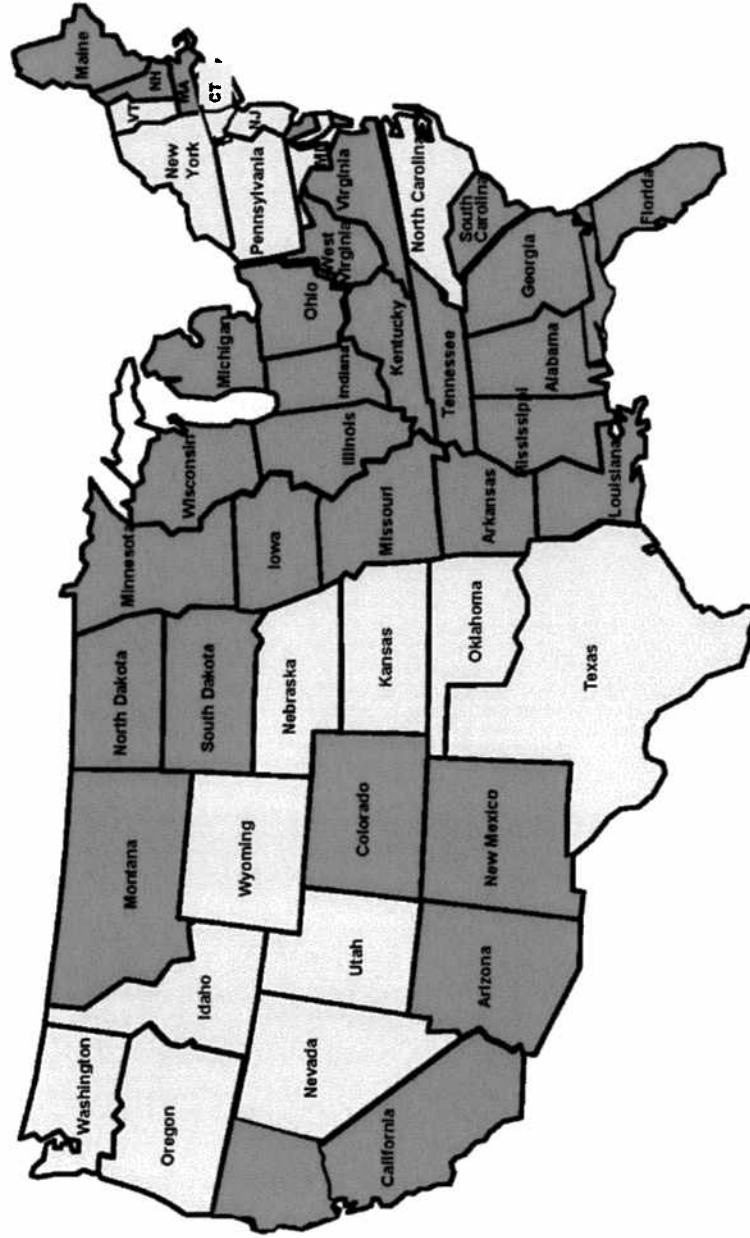
28. District of Columbia

29. North Dakota

30. Michigan

31. South Dakota

JAG NATIONAL NETWORK



JAG



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Funding

JAG State Organizations

- **Total Funding—\$50 Million**
- **15 State Legislatures—35%**
- **18 Workforce Investment Act—25%**
- **11 School District Funds—11%**
- **2 Wagner Peyser—8%**
- **40 Other Local Funding Sources**

JAG-National

- **Total Funding—\$1.6 Million**
- **Private Corporations—66%**
- **Affiliation Fees—33%**
- **Core Funders—30**

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Target Populations

- Middle School model application and the
- High School model application for youth with significant barriers to success—academics, graduation, postsecondary education and entry-level employment.
- Out-of-school youth (dropouts) with significant barriers to success—graduation, employability, postsecondary education and career advancement opportunities.
- Selection Process—active involvement of Advisory Committee.
- Youth who benefit most from the JAG Model—minorities and youth from economically poor families; youth greatest at-risk

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JAG Model in the Schools

- Specialists deployed in the schools—serve 35-45 students
- Contact—one hour per day; 5 days per week; 36 weeks
- JAG National Curriculum—37 to 86 employability competencies
- JAG Career Association—develop, practice and refine personal, leadership and teaming skills
- Service-Learning, Community-based Projects
- Field Trips, Guest Speakers, Job Shadowing, Mentors, Tutors
- Employer Marketing and Job Development
- Goals: Graduation, Employment and Higher Education

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JAG programs – a Good Investment

- Cost-effective – An average cost of \$1,600 per participant.
- Grads with full-time jobs more than repay program cost in taxes alone in just **14 months**
- Data for tracking and reporting required by WIA and other funding sources is through the JAG Electronic National Data Management System

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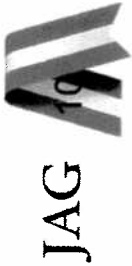


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Performance Goals and Outcomes—Class of 2008

Performance	Goals	Actual Outcomes
Graduation Rate	90%	94%
Positive Outcomes Rate	80%	79%
Aggregate Employment Rate	60%	60.0%
Full-time Jobs Rate	60%	66%
Full-time Placement Rate	80%	89%
Further Education Rate	35%	46%
JAG Documents Extraordinary and Consistent Results—Annually!		

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U.S. Chamber of Commerce Survey Findings

- Employers with JAG graduates from the Class of 2003 were asked to rate their perceptions of JAG workers as well as the JAG program.
- “The results portray a highly successful program that enjoys considerable success and one that is valued among JAG employers. Both the JAG program and the worker consistently received high rankings throughout the survey.”
- An overwhelming majority of supervisors are “Very Likely” or “Somewhat Likely” to employ other JAG graduates. **(98%)**
- Only **3%** of the JAG workers did not meet supervisors’ expectations about the overall work value they would receive from a JAG graduate.

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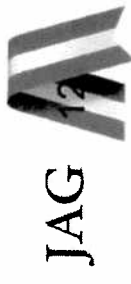


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JAG and WIA both:

- Have goals of retention and graduation
- Employment
- Demand 12 months of follow-up
- Want measurable outcomes: Meeting Youth Performance Measures
- Want support services to enable youth to stay in school and also be successful on the job and in higher education.

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Partnerships with Workforce Investment Boards

- JAG Affiliates employ & deploy staff in schools or adult learning facilities
- Assure accountability to attain bottom-line goals
- Conduct effective visibility & informational campaign
- Research, engage, and support employers needs for effective employees.

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Research Findings

- Dr. Andy Sum, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University
- Research Study: Employment Impact of JAG Graduates
- In-school Work Experience:
 - Increases the likelihood of employment upon graduation for all graduates including those enrolled in college
 - Increases the access of non-enrolled participants to full-time jobs
 - Provides college students access to jobs with more work hours per week
 - Increases weekly hours worked and hourly wages of non-enrolled graduates

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KEY AREAS OF IMPACT

- Dramatic differences among low income JAG minority youth:
 - 56 percent improvement in employment for Hispanic youth
 - 24 percent improvement in employment for African Americans
- Full-time employment in comparison to similar youth:
 - 22 percent improvement in full-time employment for JAG grads
 - 45 percent improvement for African American youth
 - 70 percent improvement for Hispanic youth
- Full-time employment for low income youth:
 - 88 percent difference for African American youth
 - 102 percent difference for Hispanic youth
- JAG youth employed for more hours:
 - 31 percent improvement in mean hours for all youth
 - 45 percent improvement in mean hours for African American youth

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JAG—A Proven Solution!

- Targeting and keeping youth at-risk of graduating in school—**96 percent!**
- Achieving a remarkable graduation rate—**93.6 percent!**
- Helping graduates find jobs with career advancement opportunities—**52 percent!**
- Encouraging graduates to pursue a postsecondary education—**45.6 percent!**
- Extraordinary impact on employment for all JAG graduates particularly low income minority youth

“The 4-R’s of JAG—Rigor, Relevance, Recognition and Rewards”





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Jobs for America's Graduates, Inc.

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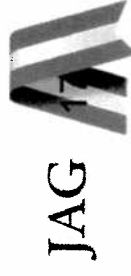
www.jag.org

Governor John E. Baldacci (ME), Chairman of the Board
Governor Mike Beebe (AR), Vice Chairman of the Board

Kenneth M. Smith, President

Jim Koeninger, Ph.D., Executive Vice President

"The 4-R's of JAG—Rigor, Relevance, Recognition and Rewards"





JOBS FOR AMERICA'S GRADUATES:

Dropout Prevention, Postsecondary Education,
Careers and Leadership Development for At-Risk Youth

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

WHAT - Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) is a 30-year old non-profit youth development program dedicated to helping at-risk young people graduate from high school and make successful transitions to postsecondary education or meaningful employment. JAG has served over 700,000 youth since its inception and is currently helping 42,000 young people in 800 schools and other locations in 32 states to achieve academic, career and life success.

WHY - 7,000 young people drop out each school day. Today, the average graduation rate for all youth in the nation is just 68%. When one-third of our nation's youth leave school without a diploma or direction, we are compromising our future. One of the bottom line numbers that brings the enormity of this problem into focus is the incarceration rate for dropouts: 65% of state prison inmates are high school dropouts. This is just one example of how the vitality of our economy, our workforce, our citizens and our communities is at stake.

JAG RESULTS -

- **94% Graduation Rate** - completion of a high school diploma or GED.
- **80% Positive Outcome Rate** - at the close of 12 months of follow-up after graduation (i.e., students are employed, in the military, in postsecondary training, or some combination)
- **46% Higher Education Rate (highest in our history!)** - Students graduate from high school and successfully transition into post-secondary education.

THE JAG MODEL: COMPREHENSIVE, PRACTICAL, PROVEN. ACCOUNTABLE, COST EFFECTIVE

- **Classroom Instruction.** A trained "**Career Specialist**" provides individual and group instruction to **35-45 students** in a class delivered for credit during the school day.
- **Employability Skills.** The JAG NATIONAL CURRICULUM equips participants with a minimum of 37 employability competencies and intensive career exploration and training opportunities.
- **Adult Mentoring.** Specialists (JAG teachers) provide 180 contact hours and the individual attention at risk students need to overcome barriers that stand in the way of personal and academic success.
- **Advice and Support.** Specialists provide guidance as students make significant career and life decisions and connect participants to other social and education services in the community.
- **Summer Employment Training.** Job placement is provided and partnerships are developed with summer youth employment programs to maximize year-long learning.
- **Student-Led Leadership Development.** Participants join a highly motivating student-led organization to develop, practice and refine their leadership and teaming skills and serve their communities.
- **Job and Postsecondary Education Placement Services.** Employer marketing and assistance with postsecondary education opportunities is provided by the Specialist to support their students' postsecondary goals and successful transition to those opportunities following graduation.
- **12-Month Follow-up Services.** JAG provides no less than twelve months of follow-up services and support to participants after graduation or completion of a GED.
- **Accountability System.** A comprehensive, internet-based tracking and reporting system that includes information on the participants served, services delivered and performance outcomes.
- **Cost Effective Approach.** The average cost per participant is \$1,600. Considerably less than other programs with the same goals.



JOBS FOR AMERICA'S GRADUATES: Dropout Prevention, Postsecondary Education, Careers and Leadership Development for At-Risk Youth **U.S. CHAMBER SURVEY RESULTS**

In October 2003, Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program conducted a survey of its graduates with the assistance of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Statistics and Research Center. The survey asked employers partnered with JAG to rate their perceptions of JAG workers as well as their opinion of the JAG program. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Research Report portrays JAG as a highly successful program that enjoys considerable success and one that is valued among JAG employers. Both the JAG program and the workers consistently received high rankings throughout the survey.

FINDING #1:

Supervisors were extremely positive about their experience with the JAG program and their likelihood of offering further opportunities to current and future JAG workers. An overwhelming majority of the supervisors are "Very Likely" or "Somewhat Likely" to employ other JAG graduates (98%).

FINDING #2:

Supervisors are likely to offer a fulltime position to JAG workers (90%), as well as other opportunities, such as career advancement and promotions (91%).

FINDING #3:

Supervisors were generally very positive about the overall work value they receive from their JAG worker. In fact, the JAG worker "Greatly Exceeded" or "Exceeded" the expectations of 42% of those responding. An additional 44% had their expectations met. Only 3% of the JAG workers did not meet supervisors' expectations.

FINDING #4:

JAG workers are highly rated by their supervisors and do well in every core competency category taught to JAG workers. Supervisors rated the following core competencies either "Excellent" or "Good".

- Works well with others 87%
- Good grooming and appearance 85%
- Follows directions 83%
- Verbal communication 80%
- Punctual and at work as scheduled 78%

FINDING #5:

JAG workers are productive with 75% of supervisors in "Agreement" or "Strong Agreement".

FINDING #6:

JAG refers qualified applicants with 77% of supervisors in "Agreement" or "Strong Agreement".

FINDING #7:

JAG is helpful to our business with 71% of supervisors in "Agreement" or "Strong Agreement".

FINDING #8:

JAG workers rank higher than non-JAG workers. JAG workers compare more favorably to their non-JAG worker counterparts in every core competency area addressed in the survey. Top five areas where JAG workers rated "Better" compared to non-JAG workers are:

- Shows strong commitment to employer
- Punctual and at work as scheduled
- Work ethics and behavior
- Positive attitude
- Works well with others

FINDING #9:

JAG workers have a higher retention rate compared to other youth serving programs with 59% of supervisors in "Agreement" or "Strong Agreement".

FINDING #10:

Overall opinion of JAG workers and JAG program indicate a highly successful organization valued by employers. The large majority (88%) of supervisors rated both the JAG program and workers as at least "Good."



JOBS FOR AMERICA'S GRADUATES: Dropout Prevention, Postsecondary Education, Careers and Leadership Development for At-Risk Youth **EMPLOYMENT IMPACT RESULTS**

The results of a comparison survey conducted in the spring of 2004 of the young people that graduated in the JAG Class of 2003 are of great interest. This includes one of our first comparison studies of the outcomes of JAG young people versus youth of similar backgrounds in more than a decade. JAG follows up with the young people for a full 12 months after they leave school. Therefore, this survey includes the results of the follow-up period for the Class of 2003.

This work was conducted with funds from a U.S. Department of Labor earmark grant.

The following are some of the important findings:

- **JAG has increased the number of males in our program from a low of 40 percent to just about 44 percent.** While we have not yet reached our goal of a 50:50 distribution, we are pleased by our progress, given the great challenges that young minority males, in particular, face in completing high school.
- **We are serving a nearly 50:50 split between minority and white youth.**
- Just under half of our young people are receiving some form of free or subsidized lunch – a major indicator of economic disadvantages that, importantly, can be “proven.”
- **On average, the mean hourly wage of our young people is \$7.32**, with weekly earnings of \$243. For all of our young people, the average number of hours worked on a weekly basis is 32.5 hours. For those enrolled in college, the average number of hours worked per week is 27.9 hours. For those not enrolled in college, the average number of hours worked per week is 34.9 hours.
- **It is interesting to note the ethnic differences in hours of work, hourly wages, and weekly wages among our young people.** JAG Hispanic youth exceeded all other youth by working an average of 35.5 hours of work per week at a mean hourly wage of \$8.57 for a mean weekly wage of \$309.

WORK AND EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS

- A very important set of conclusions on the influence of in-school work experience on post high school labor market success was emphasized by Dr. Sum. Based on his analysis, in-school work experience:
 - Increases the likelihood of employment upon graduation for **all** graduates including those enrolled in college.
 - Increases the access of the non-enrolled participants to full-time jobs.
 - Provides college students access to jobs with more work hours per week.
 - Increases the weekly hours worked and hourly wages of non-enrolled graduates.
- **One of the most important findings compares JAG's young people with youth from similar backgrounds. In particular, please note:**
 - Overall, there was a positive 7 percent difference in success in employment for all participants in the JAG program.

- **The very dramatic differences are among JAG minority youth**, with a *27 percent* improvement for African American youth and a *38 percent* improvement in employment for Hispanic American young people compared to similar youth not enrolled in JAG programs.
- **For low-income Hispanics**, there was a *56 percent* difference, and for low-income African Americans, there was a *24 percent* difference.
- **When it comes to full-time employment in comparison to similar youth, the differences are even larger:** for all JAG participants, there was a *22 percent* difference in full-time employment. For African American youth, the difference was *45 percent*, and for Hispanic youth, a *70 percent* difference.
- **For low-income African American youth**, the impact of participation in JAG rises to an extraordinary *88 percent* difference, and for low-income Hispanic American youth, a full *102 percent* difference!
- Reinforcing the point that our young people are more likely to be employed for more hours, **there is an overall 31 percent difference in the mean number of hours worked for all of our young people** compared to the comparison group. Again, among minority youth, the impact is even more dramatic: *45 percent* for African Americans.
- The one area of some concern is that for the first time, our young people are making less per hour on average than the comparison group. While our young people **do** make considerably more money each week, it is because they are more likely to be employed full-time or to work more part-time hours than the comparison group. Interestingly, the gaps narrow among minority youth.

This is certainly an area on which we are focusing, but it may also reflect the impact of the highest number of young people to be enrolled in higher education in our history, 40 percent, which may reduce their ability to pursue higher-skilled jobs while in college or technical school.

The bottom line: The JAG program is making a *dramatic* difference in employment for the very high-risk and economically disadvantaged young people in comparison to youth from similar backgrounds. Most importantly, JAG is having the greatest impact, by far, on the youth with the greatest number of barriers and challenges – especially on minority youth.

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DECEMBER 2009

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The **Value** of Giving



**HR salary
survey**

**Zero-tolerance
violence policies**

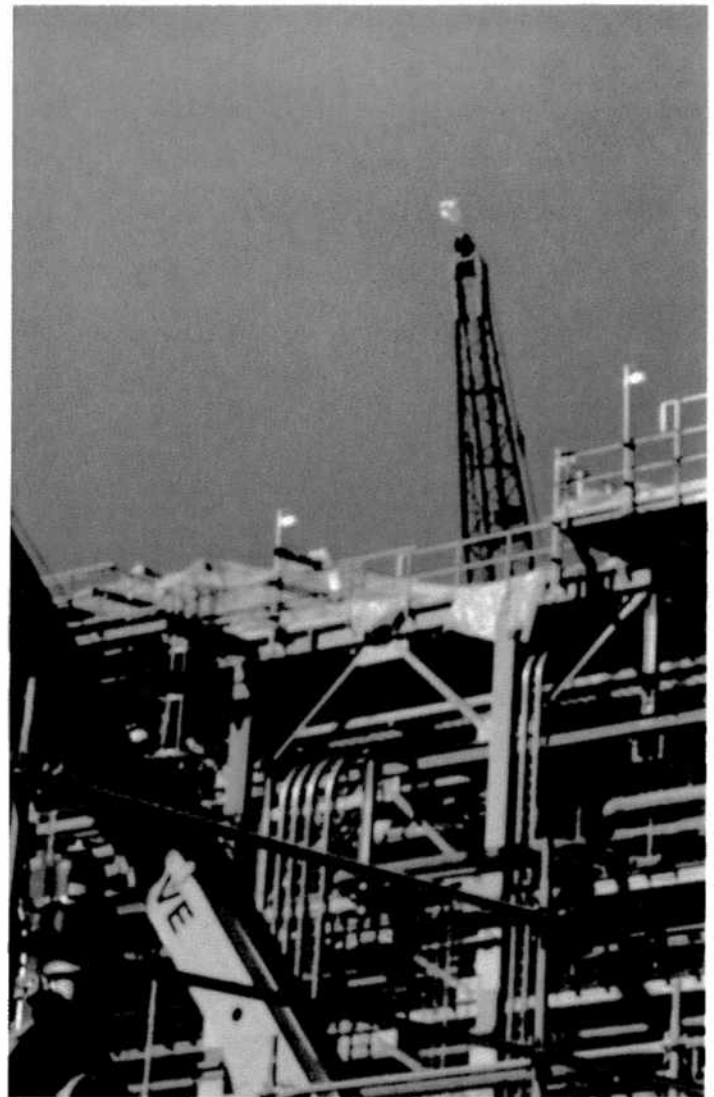
**Social
networking
at work**

SHRM
SOCIETY FOR HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Helping Students Stay in School

Business and
education partners
fight to keep
high schoolers from
dropping out.

By Theresa Minton-Eversole



Magen Merrill lived with her grandparents and father during high school in rural North Anson, Maine. Money was tight, and she worked as a waitress at a campground and restaurant to pay for her 1986 Chevy, which she parked downtown to meet and party with friends.

Merrill loved Maine's "small-town atmosphere and environment. But many teachers and guidance counselors see that as a red flag—when you want to stick around and not 'get out of Dodge.' My aspirations have always been to have a family and the simple life—not so successful, to some."

So Merrill, now 23, had few options after graduating from Carrabec High School in 2004, and there weren't that many jobs.

"A lot of kids from Carrabec start working, most of the time with their parents, and get stuck because other people depend on their incomes; you can't easily work a full-time job and still be motivated to go to school. High school pregnancy is also high in rural Maine. Try having a family and then getting a higher education while supporting a kid.

"I appeared to be heading down the same road," says Merrill. "What kept me from that future was the love of my family,

The author is an online editor/manager for SHRM.



encouragement from Jobs for America's Graduates and guidance to a successful working career."

Not all high school-aged students are so lucky. According to the U.S. Department of Education, roughly a quarter of U.S. high schoolers don't graduate on time with a regular diploma.

Jobs for America's Graduates serves as a 28-state model for reducing dropout rates. The school-to-career programs at 700 middle, high and alternative schools and community colleges aim to keep students such as Merrill in school through high school graduation and provide work experiences that lead to better jobs or postsecondary education and careers.

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) served nearly 40,000 students in 2006-07 and has served more than 550,000 since 1980. More than 90 percent graduate from high school, with at least 80 percent moving into jobs, the military or college immediately following graduation.

Programs mostly run through nonprofit state organizations or state agencies. Sixty-two sites in Maine, for example, operate Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG) programs. Since 1993, JMG has served more than 20,000 students at the highest risk of disengaging or dropping out of school. JMG served 2,745 students during 2007-08, and program specialists—considered the most critical points of contact with participants—followed up with 632 middle schoolers

and high schoolers from the prior year. Initially created to bring high school seniors from school to work, JMG now reaches into more than 200 communities.

Maine Gov. John Baldacci, who currently chairs the JAG executive board of directors, says corporate sponsors, along with a data-driven model of accountability, heighten effectiveness.

"Kids are coming out of school not prepared for work," says Gov. Baldacci. "There's this frustration in the business community; they're asking, 'What's going on?' JAG gives them an opportunity to create a partnership with education. They're being asked, even in this down economy, to at least interview JAG graduates, to provide internships and to continue to reach out. And they've been more than willing to provide those kinds of connections because they know that they need to have workers ready and trained for jobs."

Merrill was enrolled in JMG as a sophomore. As a senior, she fulfilled the job-shadow requirement at Cianbro Corp. in Pittsfield, Maine. Cianbro provides fabrication and assembly services to clients worldwide. Its hard-to-fill jobs include positions for pipefitters and welders, heavy equipment operators, electrical and industrial engineers, safety specialists, and project managers. She recalls her first interview:

"They offered me a summer internship that day; I learned a lot

Workforce Readiness

and liked it. That fall, I started taking classes full time at the University of Maine-Orono while working part time at Cianbro, but I got burned out quickly. I didn't have the funds to live like most 18-year-olds like to live, either, and I enjoyed working more."

Now full-time manager of the document control department, she's still taking classes. In 2006, she bought her first home.

"I'm on the eight-year plan," she says jokingly, noting that she expects to earn her bachelor's degree in 2012. "But I'm very happy and have absolutely no regrets about my decision to both work and go to school."

Planning Tomorrow's Workforce Today

Like Cianbro, hospital management company HCA, headquartered in Nashville, Tenn., faces recruitment challenges. With operations in 20 states and 183,000 employees, the company signed on with JAG in 2003 to help fill its talent pipeline.

"We're worried about having enough workers to take care of our patients in the future," says John M. Steele, HCA's senior vice president of human resources. "We're interested in anyone who's interested in a health care career."

To that end, the company has set aside \$10 million in a fund to provide scholarships to students and workers in career transitions to health care jobs. Through Jobs for Tennessee Graduates, Steele strives to connect with workers and talk about health care careers.

"You're talking to kids who are going to graduate and who are likely going to be highly productive," he says. "You can't say that about every [youth development] organization you work with. But that's what makes companies that work with JAG comfortable about the time, energy and money they invest."

"It's really about helping HCA achieve its long-term business goals of finding talent."

For many students, such opportunities represent rare second chances. Andrea Weeks-Toy was 16 years old and four months

How the Program Works

National standards require that Jobs for America's Graduates affiliate state organizations help:

- 90 percent of participants finish a diploma program or receive a General Educational Development certificate.
- 80 percent achieve full- or part-time employment, or enrollment in postsecondary education or a full-time military post within 12 months after graduation.
- 60 percent secure employment in full- or part-time jobs.

National JAG analysts accredit and monitor compliance. A web-based national data management system tracks and reports participants served, services delivered and outcomes achieved.

pregnant when she moved to Virginia from Hawaii with her family. She enrolled in Bryant Alternative High School in Alexandria during the fall of 2001 and was placed in the Jobs for Virginia Graduates (JVG) program. She was also placed in a school Project Opportunity program for unwed teen mothers. Through the programs, Weeks-Toy received tutoring for class work and learned parenting skills.

"If I had enrolled in regular high school, I probably could have finished, but it would have been so much more challenging," Weeks-Toy says. The support "meant everything to me. The caring atmosphere at Bryant—that people want you to succeed—is critical."

Son Ian was born in February 2002; she graduated from Bryant that June, then enrolled in Northern Virginia Community College to pursue a nursing degree. Working part time as a phlebotomist during school, she was asked by JVG staff in 2004 to participate in a state job growth and training conference. There, she met HCA's Steele, who offered a stipend to help her finish nursing school, provided she agreed to work at HCA for two years.

"Students coming out of these programs are highly motivated to give back and appreciate having a second chance," says Weeks-Toy.

Reading, Writing, Recruiting

Global agricultural processor Archer Daniels Midland Co. (ADM) employs 28,000 workers, from laborers, operations personnel and commercial traders to engineers and research scientists. As with Cianbro and HCA, long-term recruiting remains a priority.

"We're hiring to build careers," says Michael D'Ambrose, ADM's senior vice president of human resources. JAG programs "give us the workforce that we need to fill our pipeline with talent to grow the company."

The program is especially important for ADM because a significant portion of its workforce hails from Decatur, Ill., a small rural region that was plagued with a large high school dropout

Too Many Drop Out

According to the report *The Condition of Education 2009*, released by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, only about 75 percent of the 2002-03 freshman class graduated on time with regular high school diplomas. Many factors are associated with measures of educational attainment, including graduation and dropout rates, immediate college enrollment rates and attainment of postsecondary degrees. They include:

- Student persistence and effort.
- Parents' educational attainment.
- Family income.

rate in 2006. D'Ambrose introduced JAG to Decatur that year—and the impact has been significant.

Today, the majority of Decatur's youth graduate high school. Yet D'Ambrose says more than the graduation rate has improved:

"ADM employees have partnered with teachers to help them prepare students for the workplace. And now, education, community and business leaders throughout the area participate in the education partnership," D'Ambrose says proudly.

With so many U.S. ninth graders delaying or never making it to high school graduation, "How does this nation not get this as one of its biggest crises?" he asks.

Personal Commitment: Not Child's Play

D'Ambrose, a former Toys "R" Us executive, introduced the giant toy retailer to JAG in 2002, says Teresa Orth, vice president of human resources for the 72,000-

Online Resources

For additional information about workforce readiness, see the online version of this article at www.shrm.org/hrmagazine for links to:

- Reports on workforce preparedness.
- SHRM articles on talent management.
- SHRM's Workforce Readiness Toolkit.
- A SHRM video about Jobs for America's Graduates.
- The Jobs for America's Graduates web site.
- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for a Competitive Workforce web site.
- The U.S. Department of Education web site.

employee retailer headquartered in Wayne, N.J.; 2004 was the first year she represented the company at a JAG awards luncheon.

"I watched those students stand and tell their personal stories to a group that size and listened to how they drew their strength from the JAG program team members," recalls Orth. "It was a life-altering experience that helps you put your own life into perspective. After that, I asked how I could become more involved."

"But it's a business prop-

A Model for Achieving Workforce Readiness

The performance achieved by Jobs for America's Graduates is accomplished through:

Classroom instruction. Eighty-six activity-based and competency-based modules provide more than 860 hours of classroom instruction.

Employability skills building. Thirty-seven competencies focus on employability. They include job attainment skills such as taking pre-employment tests and interviewing; job survival skills such as time management, leadership and team participation; and basic skills training in communications and math calculation.

Adult mentors. Specialists help students overcome socioeconomic and academic barriers that prevent them from completing requirements for a high school diploma, securing employment or pursuing postsecondary education. They provide advice as students make career

and life decisions in ninth through 11th grades. Specialists also might connect participants to professional counselors to address barriers such as mental health problems or substance abuse.

Summer employment training. Job placement services help students find work during the summer, and partnerships with summer youth employment programs support year-round learning.

Student-led leadership development. A student-led organization helps motivate students, builds on the competency-based curriculum, and provides opportunities to develop, practice and refine leadership and teaming skills.

Placement services. Intensive, one-on-one employer marketing and job development activities identify entry-level job opportunities for students after graduation or completion of a General Educational Development diploma.

Likewise, specialists assist graduates in exploring postsecondary education and show them how to navigate the financial aid process.

Links to school and community services. JAG programs serve as a school-based one-stop center for at-risk youth and deliver academic and social services.

Follow-up. JAG specialists provide no less than 12 months of follow-up and support on the job or in postsecondary education.

Accountability. Tracking participants served, services delivered and performance outcomes achieved provides a vehicle for holding programs accountable.

Professional development. Continuous improvement comes through ongoing professional development for staff.

—Theresa Minton-Eversole



Andrea Weeks-Toy at Reston Hospital Center in Virginia.

osition, too," she continues. "Being pragmatic, it gives you access to a workforce that is well-trained, well-motivated, supervised. These students want to work, they have to work, and they recognized the value of work. This is about surviving, about life skills. For many of these students, it's their first job, so recognize that you can give back and cherish the opportunity that you have to give that person their first great job experience."

Toys "R" Us provides information about all open positions to JAG participants in many states. And since 2008, it has set priorities for JAG candidates within interview pools.

Yet in an uncertain economic environment, the retailer is being prudent in accessing its hiring needs. So, "We offer resources from our teams to help train JAG program specialists," says Orth. Company representatives help with student competitions structured around skills like interviewing and resume writing. "They take these competitions very seriously; you can see it in the pride they take in their personal appearance, the level of detail and mastery in completing their resumes. It just gives

you a complete appreciation for the honesty and sincerity these students have for 'making it out' and for minimizing their at-risk quotients."

Pay It Forward

JAG continues to be limited by lack of recognition among state governments and the private sector. Orth says the national organization is exploring ways to connect with JAG alumni and spur them to share their stories.

After receiving her nursing degree in 2006, Weeks-Toy went to work as an emergency room nurse at Reston (Va.) Hospital Center, where she remains today. She still speaks occasionally at JAG fundraising events. Now 24 and living in Burke, Va., she's married and has two more children.

Merrill also does what she can as an alumna. In fact, Cianbro recently signed an agreement with JMG to make sure its students stand first in line for available summer internships at the company—and Merrill plans to work with them. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT RATH